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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS III #4: THE PRSC IN DECLINE

Classified By: Michael A. Meigs

1. This is the fourth cable in our series on Dominican politics in the third year of the administration of President Leonel Fernandez.

#### The PRSC in Decline

(SBU) The Dominican Social Christian Reform Party (PRSC) is badly split and in search of justification for its continued existence. The Reformistas went down to humiliating defeat in the 2006 congressional elections, in a failure of their attempt to unite with the major opposition party, the PRD. Polls show the PRSC with support of only about 9 percent of the electorate, and much of that is in Altagracia, the easternmost province in the country, the personal fief of the PRSC's Amable Aristy Castro.

(U) The PRSC was the personal vehicle of Joaquin Balaguer, president of the Dominican Republic in his own right for 22 years. Balaguer's death in 2002 left the party with little more than his empty image. In 2005 veteran PRSC politician Enrique &Quique8 Antun Batlle became president of the party and Victor Gmez Casanova, former head of the PRSC Youth Organization, was elected to a four-year term as Secretary General.

#### A Talk with the PRSC Secretary General

(U) Gomez Casanova told political officers on September 18 that the PRSC is sliding toward irrelevancy. He was growing increasingly concerned by the party's internal conflicts.

(C) Gomez sees that the President Fernandez's Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) is successfully siphoning off potential PRSC voters for the 2008 presidential election. At the same time, self-inflicted blows marginalize the PRSC among the populace. &The sad truth is that we have never had an ideology; Reformistas traditionally have done anything for money.8

(C) Gomez suggested that love of power and position enticed

PRSC defectors to important positions in the Fernandez government. The highest-ranking PRSC member to defect, Foreign Minister Carlos Morales Troncoso, did so in the run-up to the 2004 presidential elections, President Fernandez continues to co-opt PRSC adherents for relatively high-ranking government positions. He recently put disaffected PRSC leaders in as the head of the critically important Energy Commission and also as director of the National Housing Bank (Banco Nacional de la Vivienda).

(U) Far less subtle than the political appointments that buy personal loyalty is Fernandez's attempt to win popular support among the roughly 9 percent of the populace that voted PRSC in the presidential election of 2004. Most recently, Fernandez staged a four-hour multi-media extravaganza at the presidential palace to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Balaguer's birth (ref). Speakers including Fernandez himself focused on praising Balaguer-era public works projects and conveniently omitted mention of the persecutions and not infrequent assassination of leftists under both Trujillo (for whom Balaguer served as titular president) and Balaguer himself.

(U) The damage from Fernandez and PLD politicking pales in comparison to that inflicted by a single individual supposedly loyal to the PRSC party structure: Amable Aristy Casto.

#### Amable Aristy Casto

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(C) In the 2006 Congressional elections, Amable Aristy Casto once again stood for Senator from Higüey and once again won with 60 percent support. What was remarkable, however, is that he turned this elected position down, as he had already done - - on two previous occasions - - in order to remain in contention to succeed himself yet again as the director of the Dominican Municipal League (LMD), the governmental organization that acts as a conduit for annual central government disbursements to the 150-plus local governments and municipalities. The LMD presidency election is in January; Aristy Casto has held the position since 1998. He has extensive political influence through his largely discretionary control of the money, even though the position does not carry the public trappings of a Senator. The LMD owns a helicopter for Aristy's travels. With that much money on hand, many assume that Aristy is helping himself to some of it (though the Embassy has no direct knowledge of such).

(SBU) Former President of the House of Representatives, PRD leader Alfredo Pacheco, is openly campaigning for the position; Senate President Reinaldo Pared Pérez has gotten sufficiently annoyed by the situation that he has threatened to break with the tradition of electing an opposition politician to the LMD presidency.

(C) One Dominican blogger suggests that a gross violation of trust is damaging the credibility of Aristy and that of the PRSC generally. Worse, Aristy Casto with his unpredictable actions has helped drive a wedge between the youth and mainstream factions of the party. Gomez Casanova comments that Aristy's decision may be the PRSC's Waterloo.

(C) The Secretary General says he urged Aristy to assume his Senate seat for the good of the party and for his own reputation. In August journalists revealed that the United States had cancelled Aristy's non-immigrant visa for unspecified reasons, a matter that Aristy has stubbornly refused to comment upon. (We understand that U.S. law enforcement has information very tentatively linking him to a drugs/money-laundering investigation.) Gomez told Embassy officials that he had gone so far as to suggest to Aristy if he would take up his Senate seat, Aristy could expect the party to endorse his bid for the PRSC nomination for the presidential election in 2008. Despite this offer, Aristy refused.

(C) This engendered a showdown between youth and mainstream factions on the PRSC's thirty-one member Political Committee. Gomez Casanova and eleven other young Committee members approached PRSC President Enrique Antun on September 9, suggesting that the Political Committee refuse to endorse Aristy for the LMD position (thereby forcing him into his

Senate seat). In a subsequent meeting with Aristy, Gomez, and other PRSC powerbrokers, PRSC President Antun indicated that an endorsement for the LMD bid would be forthcoming on Tuesday, September 12. As a result, Gomez and his supporters boycotted the endorsement proceedings that took place that day.

(C) Gomez, has suggested to Embassy officials that Aristy,s endorsement by the remaining nineteen was obtained by unscrupulous means. &Money talks, 8 he said. In another move that will certainly damage the PRSC,s public image, President Antun will probably ask the party to name as Aristy,s replacement a cousin of Aristy Castro, currently a PRSC congressional representative.

(U) In a last ditch effort to head off this crisis (or perhaps just to shore up his personal reputation) Gomez on September 18 went to the press, asking the PRSC political committee to reconsider its position. His blunt contention is that the majority of Reformistas would prefer the National Palace to the LMD.

(C) Comment: The PRSC lost its focus with the disappearance of Balaguer and now struggles to find its way without a patron in a political system that is moving, however slowly, away from naked patronage. Unless the leadership can redefine its goals and its reason for existence, the PRSC will continue its slow disintegration. More members will be pulled into the PLD,s orbit while remaining Reformistas

discredit themselves by self-seeking squabbles.

12. (U) Drafted by Michael Garuckis .

13. (U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPIRNET site,  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/> .  
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